

Piotr Bajor

A strategic challenge - The influence of historical policy on the current shape of the Polish-Ukrainian relations

Historical issues have been one of the most important elements influencing the relations between Poland and Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Over the course of many years, the governments of both countries have been highlighting the necessity of implementing the process of reconciliation and many statements have been made in this regard. The latest events in the Polish-Ukrainian relations have indicated, however, that historical issues are still essential for mutual understanding and, as a consequence, the relations between Poland and Ukraine have significantly worsened. Therefore, in this article some key documents that became the reason of tensions in bilateral relations will be analyzed.

In the course of time, the Polish-Ukrainian relations have been defined in terms of strategic partnership. The governments of both countries kept stressing how special the relations between Poland and Ukraine were for a constructive cooperation in bilateral relations, as well as at a wider international level. Within the next couple of years many documents have been adopted which related to the tragic pages of history of their relations and have been directed toward mutual reconciliation¹.

Based on the analysis of the current processes undergoing in the Polish-Ukrainian relationship, one can put forward a hypothesis that reconciliation advocated in the mentioned documents addressed mainly political elites and authorities, and has not led to any broader changes in the Polish and Ukrainian societies. What is more, the historical policy of Ukraine due to the actions taken by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR) after the "Revolution of Dignity" has raised concerns about its

¹ Such matters have been recently analyzed by many researchers and experts, and the results of the research are presented in such publications as: T. Horbowski, P. Kosiewski (eds.), *Pamięć i pytania o tożsamość. Polska-Ukraina*, Warszawa 2013; T. A. Olszański, *Miejsce UPA w wielkiej wojnie ojczyźnianej. Dylematy polityki historycznej Ukrainy*, Punkt Widzenia OSW, Nr 35, Warszawa, June 2013; J. Konieczna-Sałamatin, *Polacy i Ukraińcy – wzajemne postrzeganie w trudnych czasach*, in T. Horbowski, P. Kosiewski (eds.), *Polityka bezpieczeństwa. Polska-Ukraina*, Warszawa 2015.

approach toward the nationalist groups, part of which – from the Polish perspective – are perceived as responsible for the Volhynian massacre.

Resolutions of the Polish Parliament on genocide

In the aftermath of controversial Ukraine's actions, a vigorous debate opened in Poland regarding the commemoration of innocent victims killed by Ukrainian nationalists. Some politicians from ruling party insisted that the Volhynian tragedy should be considered as genocide against the Polish nation². The attempts to include such wording in a resolution on the Volhynian case had been made in the Polish Parliament before the "Revolution of Dignity" began in Kiev. In 2013, such a proposal was submitted by some deputies to the Sejm (the lower chamber) as well as by senators (members of the upper house). However, the resolution that was eventually adopted at that time included the following wording – "ethnic cleansing with the characteristic of genocide"³. In 2016, following the victory of the Law and Justice party in the parliamentary elections in October 2015, a significant change occurred in the approach of the parliamentary majority and the government, which got strongly committed to include the term "genocide" as appropriate for the classification of the Volhynian tragedy.

On July 7, 2016, the Senate of the Republic of Poland adopted a resolution on "paying tribute to the victims of genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on the citizens of the Republic of Poland in 1939-1945". In the first part of the document senators made reference to the tragic historical events. They pointed to the 73rd anniversary of the culmination of the crime waves that were committed against the Polish citizens by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and SS Galizien division. It was emphasized that as a result of this act of genocide during the Second World War more than one hundred thousand Poles, Jews, Armenians, Czechs,

²Michał Dworczyk o ludobójstwie na Wołyniu: "Dobre relacje z Ukrainą mogą być budowane tylko w oparciu o prawdę", <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/281440-michal-dworczyk-o-ludobojstwie-na-wolyniu-dobre-relacje-z-ukraina-moga-byc-budowane-tylko-w-oparciu-o-prawde>; *PiS do Ukraińców: nie upamiętniamy ludzi, którzy mają na rękach krew niewinnych*, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/list-politykow-pis-do-ukraincow-w-zwiazku-z-73-rocznica-wolynia,654243.html> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

³Sejm zdecydował. Rzeź wołyńska "czystką etniczną o znamionach ludobójstwa". 10 posłów PO złamało dyscyplinę, <http://www.rp.pl/arttykul/1028773-Sejm-zdecydowal--Rzez-wolynska--czystka-etniczna-o-znamionach-ludobojstwa---10-poslow-PO-zlamalo-dyscypline.html> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

and members of other national minorities died. Senators highlighted that an accurate number of victims is still unknown to this day⁴.

The Senate also stressed that amongst the victims there was also a lot of Ukrainians who had been helping the Poles. Therefore, senators expressed their “respect and appreciation” to them for showing such support while risking their own lives. They also called upon the President of the Republic of Poland to award those people. The Senate also showed its highest appreciation to the self-protective formations that made their attempts to defend the victims⁵.

Further in the document, the Polish Senate paid tribute to all Polish citizens who were “viciously murdered by the Ukrainian nationalists”. It was added that the victims to this day were not properly commemorated and many of them were not given a chance for a decent burial. It was also highlighted that the massacres were not properly classified since according to the historical truth they constituted genocide. Therefore, the Senate called upon the Sejm to name July 11th the “National Day of Remembrance of Victims of Genocide committed against the Polish citizens by Ukrainian nationalists”. Senators showed their respect also for East Borderland communities as well as all those who over decades “have been demanding the truth about a genocide and care about the remembrance of the victims”⁶.

The matter of commemorating the victims of the Volhynian conflict in the first half of 2016 was also put on the Sejm’s agenda. On July 22, 2016, deputies adopted a resolution with the same title as that adopted by senators. Both acts partially corresponded each other. The Sejm also indicated that, as a result of genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists in 1939-1945, more than one hundred thousand people were murdered, although an exact number of victims is still unknown to this day. Similarly to the Senate, Sejm emphasized that such structures as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian Insurgent Army, SS Galizien division, as well as other formations collaborating with the Nazis were responsible for this tragedy. Both acts are also very similar in their parts relating to the lack of commemoration of the victims and a decent

⁴*Uchwała Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 7 lipca 2016 r. w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1939–1945*, “Monitor Polski”, <http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/MP/2016/638/1> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

⁵*Ibidem*.

⁶*Ibidem*.

burial, lack of recognition of self-protective formations, no respect for the Ukrainian people helping the victims and the need of honoring them with national awards, as well as lack of acknowledgment for all those people who have for years been demanding to expose the truth about those tragic events⁷.

The Sejm's resolution included additional elements that were not mentioned in the document adopted by the Senate. Deputies highlighted that the former voivodships of the Republic of Poland were strongly affected during wartime as two biggest totalitarianisms of the 20th century met their match on their territories. It was pointed out that the steps taken by both occupants created some favorable conditions to awaken ethnic and religious hatred. It also was emphasized that the initiatives taken by the Polish Underground State in order to reach an agreement with the Ukrainian organizations did not bring about any satisfactory results. Moreover, it was stressed that the facts concerning the retaliatory actions taken by the Polish side, during which civilian population living in the Ukrainian villages faced death, should not be omitted⁸.

The Sejm also agreed with the recommendation proposed by senators and decided to designate July 11th the National Day of Remembrance of Victims of Genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists against the citizens of Poland. The Sejm also insisted to establish a crime scene, create a full list of victims, and provide a decent burial. The Polish MPs at the same time called for the continuation of reconciliation and dialogue with Ukraine at the political and religious levels. The Sejm also exhorted the historians from both countries to develop further cooperation, increasing the access to the source materials in the national archives as well as to strengthen cooperation between the governments of the Republic of Poland and Ukraine in the "most important matters for both countries' future relationship". It also was highlighted that only historical truth could pave the way to reconciliation and mutual forgiveness⁹.

⁷ *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 22 lipca 2016 r. w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1943–1945*, "Monitor Polski", <http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/MP/2016/726/1> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

Joint Declaration of the President of the Republic of Poland and the President of Ukraine

The above described resolutions adopted by the Polish parliament caused a sharp criticism and vehement reactions in Ukraine. In the follow-up comments, it was emphasized that the Polish MPs politicized the matter of reconciliation, showed a one-sided opinion and the Ukrainian side should react to these actions of the Polish Sejm and Senate. It is worth mentioning in the context of such vehement discussions a very significant visit that Polish president Andrzej Duda paid in Kiev on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Ukraine's independence. During Duda's meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart, both leaders emphasized the need of continuing historical dialogue at the level of historians and research institutions, as well as taking the representatives of civil society into wider consideration in this process¹⁰.

During the visit, the presidents of Poland and Ukraine signed a special declaration that included the analysis of the existing shape of the Polish-Ukrainian relations as well as priorities for the future. The document also referred to the symbolic fact that Poland had been the first state in the world that officially acknowledged Ukraine's independence in 1991. Also, some remarkable achievements of the past 25 years in the Polish-Ukrainian relations were mentioned. It was declared that a further development of the strategic relationship between both countries is an "historical no-alternative choice". It also was emphasized that the deepening of collaboration between Poland and Ukraine has good prospects, a significant potential, and lies in the deepest interest of both countries and their nations¹¹.

Resolution of the Supreme Council of Ukraine

It should be emphasized that the purpose of Duda's visit in Kiev was also to reduce the tension in the Polish-Ukrainian relations. In the following weeks a lively discussion

¹⁰ *Andrzej Duda w Kijowie z okazji 25. rocznicy niepodległości Ukrainy*, <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne/art,101,prezydent-na-uroczystosciach-z-okazji-25-rocznicy-uchwalenia-aktu-niepodleglosci-ukrainy.html> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

¹¹ *Wspólna deklaracja Prezydenta RP i Prezydenta Ukrainy*, <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne/art,102,spotkanie-prezydenta-rp-i-prezydenta-ukrainy.html> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

ensued in Ukraine on a possible response from the Supreme Council of Ukraine to the documents adopted by the Polish Parliament. A proposal of the respective resolution was eventually submitted on September 8, 2016 by deputies of several parties, as part of political consensus regarding this matter¹².

The draft of the resolution was a subject of deliberations of the parliamentary Committee on International Affairs. It was stressed, as a justification, that in July 2016 the Polish Sejm and Senate adopted two documents on commemoration of the victims of genocide that was committed by Ukrainian nationalists. Further, in the draft document its advocates analyzed some specific wordings of the Polish resolutions referring to the Ukrainian side being responsible for the Volhynian tragedy. It was highlighted that the resolutions could negatively influence the Polish-Ukrainian relations. At the same time, the Ukrainian MPs indicated that the Supreme Council, as an important forum of bilateral cooperation, should take up its position in regard to those documents. It was indicated, therefore, that the aim of adopting the proposed resolution would be to express Ukraine's opinion in this matter. Moreover, the Polish parliamentarians were called upon to restrain from further politicization of the tragic chapters of the shared history¹³.

After the discussion, the Committee on International Affairs suggested the Supreme Council to adopt the proposed document. In the Committee's position, it was indicated that the Supreme Council's reaction is necessary since the resolutions of the Polish parliament contain a distorted, legally and politically incorrect opinion of the tragic Polish-Ukrainian history. An opinion was expressed that the actions taken by the Polish deputies and senators squandered the political and diplomatic work of both countries, directed toward mutual reconciliation and understanding¹⁴.

Before the voting on the resolution, a vehement discussion took place in the Ukrainian parliament. Deputies criticized the documents adopted by the Polish

¹² The draft to the parliament was submitted by the following MPs: Iho rHryniv (Petro Poroshenko Bloc), Maksym Burbak (People's Front), Oleh Bereziuk (Self Reliance), Yulia Tymoshenko (Batkivshchyna), Oksana Syroid (Self Reliance), Borys Tarasiuk (Batkivshchyna), Ivan Krulko (Batkivshchyna), Iryna Podolyak (Self Reliance), Oleh Liashko (Oleh Liashko Radical Party). See: *Проект Постанови про Заяву Верховної Ради України "У зв'язку з ухваленням Сенатом і Сеймом Республіки Польща постанов від 7 липня 2016 року та 22 липня 2016 року що до Волинської трагедії"*, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=59978 (accessed on 12 October 2016).

¹³ *Висновок комітету*, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=59978 (accessed on 12 October 2016).

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

parliamentarians and underlined the necessity to adequately respond to it¹⁵. Eventually, 247 deputies from different parliamentary fractions, as well as non-attached MPs, voted in favor of adopting the resolution. A detailed list of the distribution of votes amongst the respective parliamentary fractions is presented below.

Table 1. Fractions voting in the Supreme Council in regard to responding to the act of the Polish parliament

Name of the fraction/group	In favor	Against	Abstention	Non-voting	Not present
<i>Petro Poroshenko Bloc</i>	99	0	2	22	20
<i>People's Front</i>	61	0	0	13	6
Non-attached	25	0	2	6	13
<i>Opposition Bloc</i>	0	0	0	29	14
<i>Self-Reliance</i>	23	0	0	0	3
Revival Party	1	0	0	5	17
Batkivshchyna	15	0	0	0	6
Oleh Lyashko Radical Party	19	0	0	0	2
People's Will	4	0	0	9	6

Source: *Поіменне голосування про проект Постанови про Заяву Верховної Ради України "У зв'язку з ухваленням Сенатом і Сеймом Республіки Польща постанов від 7 липня 2016 року та 22 липня 2016 року що до Волинської трагедії" (№5095 в редакції Комітету) - заоснована в цілому*, http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/radan_gs09/ns_golos?g_id=8479 (accessed on 12 October 2016).

In the first part of the adopted document the Supreme Council indicated that it reacted to the documents of both houses of the Polish parliament with regret as well as deep disappointment. It was stressed that the political and legal analysis of the tragic events of the shared history included in those resolutions was incorrect. The Ukrainian

¹⁵ *Стенограма пленарного засідання 08 вересня 2016. Засідання п'яте. Сесійний зал Верховної Ради України*, <http://rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenogr/show/6293.html> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

parliament highlighted the fact that both countries share the same examples of the joint struggle for freedom, as well as conflicts which caused much bloodshed. The deputies emphasized that commemoration of all victims should be respected appropriately on the territories of both countries. The Supreme Council also stressed that in the past years much effort was made on both sides for reconciliation and commemoration of those Polish and Ukrainian people who were innocently killed during World War II. The deputies also added that this commemoration was expressed in several documents adopted by both countries, intended for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation¹⁶.

Therefore, it was stated that the Sejm's decision to declare July 11th the "day of remembrance of victims of genocide that was committed by Ukrainian nationalists against the citizens of Poland" should be considered as politicization of the tragic events of a common history. It was also added that the decision made by the Polish parliament was accompanied by chauvinistic rhetoric and anti-Ukrainian actions related to destruction of Ukrainian memorials, attacks against participants of religious ceremonies, as well as the ban on some cultural events¹⁷.

The Supreme Council of Ukraine declared that the acts of the Sejm and Senate undermine political and diplomatic efforts of both countries and nations directed toward mutual forgiveness, understanding and honoring the innocent victims. Therefore, the Ukrainian parliament condemned the biased resolutions of the Sejm and Senate, directed to undermine positive results of cooperation that had been achieved as part of the constructive dialogue of both countries. The Supreme Council concluded that one-sided political opinions on the historical events can bring about a huge risk of creating conflicts between Poland and Ukraine and also may breed further radicalization of both societies. In this regard, the Supreme Council of Ukraine stated that the grounds for reconciliation and compromise between two nations can only be established by the mutual recognition of historical facts. It was highlighted that personal responsibility needs to be attributed for war crimes and crimes against humanity¹⁸.

The Ukrainian parliament also urged historians of both countries to pursue a true dialogue aimed to explain all unknown facts and historical circumstances based on

¹⁶ Заява Верховної Ради України "У зв'язку з ухваленням Сенатом і Сеймом Республіки Польща постанов від 7 липня 2016 року та 22 липня 2016 року що до Волинської трагедії", <http://portal.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/134295.html> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

reliable archival materials. The Ukrainian deputies also indicated that it is necessary to have a possibility of interpretation of historical events by both sides. They pointed out that the politicians of both countries should restrain from instrumentalizing history and using it to gain some temporary political advantages.

In the final part of the document, the Ukrainian parliamentarians made an appeal to both nations and Polish politicians to continue the strategic Polish-Ukrainian partnership and avoid exposing it to the manipulations of sensitive historical issues by different political powers. They also called upon Polish politicians to stop politicizing the tragic chapters of the shared history and focus on the building of constructive relations in order to “strengthen the partnership in democratic Europe based on European values”¹⁹.

Declaration of memory and solidarity by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland and the Supreme Council of Ukraine

The act of the Supreme Council was the next element that exacerbated the discussion on historical issues in the Polish-Ukrainian relations. Another factor that had an influence on its shape was the Polish movie „Volhynia” directed by Wojciech Smarzowski and released in the Polish theaters in October 2016. Some Ukrainian politicians and commentators described it as a partial story showing only those episodes of the difficult chapters in shared history which were convenient for Poland²⁰. At the same time, diplomatic talks were held with the purpose of breaking a standoff and tension in bilateral relations. They ended with an agreement that a respective document relating to historical issues would be adopted by both parliaments. Therefore, on October 20, 2016, the Sejm of Poland and the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted a joint „Declaration of Remembrance and Solidarity”²¹.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ See: P. Lang, *Co Ukraińcy piszą o "Wołyniu"?*, <http://jagiellonski24.pl/2016/10/14/co-ukraincy-pisza-o-wolyniu/> (accessed on 12 October 2016).

²¹ P. Bajor, *Deklaracja Pamięci i Solidarności*, Komentarz Zakładu Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego UJ, nr 9 (18) 2016, http://www.zbn.inp.uj.edu.pl/komentarze?p_p_id=56_INSTANCE_IXg4&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-1&p_p_col_count=1&groupId=92718966&articleId=134744737 (accessed on 26 October 2016).

The document consists of two parts. The first one relates to historical matters, the second one to political aspects. A reference to the tragic historical events during World War II was made in the declaration. Both parliaments deplored the aggressors and stressed how weakly the international community reacted at that time to the escalation of totalitarian attitudes and practices as well as chauvinistic postures before World War II which had led to the outbreak of war and, as a consequence, to occupation in the whole region of Eastern and Central Europe²².

It was also indicated in the document that it is necessary to intensify objective studies conducted by the historians and start a „sincere and friendly” cooperation between the experts and the researchers. It was also highlighted that it is crucial to restrain some forces whose activity is harmful and provoke mutual conflicts in Poland and Ukraine²³.

Concluding remarks

The joint parliamentary declaration was the last element in the historical discussion between Poland and Ukraine in 2016. It can be considered as a sign of political will on both sides to break the stalemate which lasted for long in relation to tragic episodes of history of both countries. The adoption of the resolution contributed to the loosening of tensions in the Polish-Ukrainian relations. To verify the research hypothesis formulated in the beginning of this article, it must be said that the tragic episodes of history are still one of the most important factors influencing the Polish-Ukrainian relations and the ongoing process of reconciliation is still far from making it real. Therefore, within the next couple of years, both governments should take further actions directed to tighten bilateral relations and follow the course of strategic cooperation which is mutually beneficial for both countries.

²²Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 20 października 2016 r. Deklaracja Pamięci i Solidarności Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej oraz Rady Najwyższej Ukrainy, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc8.nsf/uchwaly/946_u.htm (accessed on 21 October 2016).

²³*Ibidem*.

Streszczenie

W prezentowanym artykule omówione zostały najważniejsze kwestie historyczne, które w ostatniej perspektywie miały wpływ na uwarunkowania i kształt stosunków polsko-ukraińskich. Przedstawiona została analiza uchwał parlamentów Polski i Ukrainy oraz wspólnego dokumentu przyjętego przez obie izby oraz ich wpływ na bieżące relacje pomiędzy Polską a Ukrainą.

Słowa kluczowe: stosunki polsko-ukraińskie • partnerstwo strategiczne • polityka historyczna • pojednanie

Summary

In this article the most important historical issues which have influenced the developments and the shape of the Polish-Ukrainian relations have been discussed. Also, the analysis of the resolutions of the Polish and Ukrainian parliaments has been offered, as well as a joint document adopted by both houses has been examined as to its content and the way it has influenced the current relations between Poland and Ukraine.

Keywords: Polish-Ukrainian relations • strategic partnership • historical policy • reconciliation